Race, Class, Gender

Reclaiming Baggage in Fast Travelling Theories

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ABSTRACT   The article focuses on the temporal and epistemic economy connected to the transatlantic travels of the categorical triad of 'race–class–gender'. It looks at conditions and forces that have fuelled the dynamics of the discourse on differences and inequality among women and analyses feminist discourse and its aporias as a particular environment for the travels of theories. Furthermore, it follows the changes the triad of 'race–class–gender' undergoes on its transatlantic route from the United States to a German-speaking context and it outlines the theoretical challenges connected to an intersectional perspective that aims to overcome a theoretical stagnation that itself finds symptomatic expression in the ritual citing of 'race–class–gender'.

KEY WORDS   class ◆ ethnicity ◆ gender ◆ intersectionality ◆ race ◆ social theory ◆ travelling theory

For the past 20 years, questions of inequality and difference among women, especially the interconnections of race, class and gender have been at the centre of Anglo-American feminist debates. In this article, I focus on the specific temporal and epistemic economy connected to the transatlantic travels of the categorical triad of 'race–class–gender'. Starting out by taking up the metaphor of 'travelling theories', discussing its scope and limits, I gain the contours of a broader analytical framework. This allows me to focus on some of the changing conditions of traffic in concepts and theories, namely the recent development of a new constellation of knowledge and economy reflected in notions like 'cognitive' or 'academic' capitalism (Corsani, 2004; Slaughter and Leslie, 1997). Against this background, some of the more specific factors and forces that have fuelled the dynamics of the discourse on differences and inequality among women are looked at. I analyse the aporias and the moral economy of feminist discourse as a particular environment for the travels of

theories and follow the changes the triad of 'race–class–gender' under-
goes on its transatlantic route from the US to a German-speaking context.
In the last sections, I consider the irritations that accompany the arrival of
'race–class–gender' in Germany and outline the fundamental theoretical
challenges connected to the perspective of an intersectional analysis that
aims to overcome a theoretical stagnation which itself finds symptomatic
expression in the ritual citing of 'race–class–gender'.

ON TRAVELLING

Since the advent of Edward Said's essay 'The World, The Text, and The
Critic' (Said, 1983), the notion of 'travelling theory' seems to have become
its own exemplary case of a fast moving idea.[1] The diversity of disciplines,
contexts and ways in which the metaphor of 'travelling theory' has been
taken up suggests that it must have hit a nerve beyond the conventional
descriptive usefulness of the figure of 'travelling', which looks back to a
long tradition in poetical and philosophical writings from (at least) the
16th century onwards. Until recently, the notion of 'travelling' has mainly
been used in reference to travelling subjects or agents to picture their
leaving home, moving to unknown places, their experiences, discoveries
and learnings. Exemplary figures in this field are the 'ethnographer' and
the 'tourist'.

    With Edward Said's observations on the travelling of theories, some
aspects seem to have been added to the focus. In the 1980s, taking
'theories' or 'concepts' as travelling objects was more than a reminiscence
of established academic exercise in the humanities. The new perspective
was emphatically connected with a cultural turn, focusing on theories as
embedded cultural practices involved in power struggles. A growing
awareness of the ways in which theories are shaped by and charged with
the historical contexts of their articulation has inspired reflections on
historicity, on cultural difference, on translation and rearticulation of
theories that have left home (whatever that meant, before it was – rightly
– deconstructed). In the wake of these developments, the problematic of
treating 'theory' as moving object or taxonomic entity has also come to the
fore.

    The image of travelling, along with a whole set of related notions (jour-
neying, nomadism, trafficking, etc.), has also invited more intense reflec-
tion on the changing conditions of travelling. It is this aspect that seems to
have gained a lot of attention recently in media theory, cultural and social
theory. In this broader horizon, analyses confront the far-reaching changes
in the spatio-temporal set-up of contemporary culture and society as well
as the material conditions and power structures determining the traffic in
theory.

Whether in frameworks of 'postmodernity', 'second modernity', 'globalization', 'world society', 'late capitalism', the 'Empire', 'techno-capitalism', 'knowledge-' or 'network society', phenomena of a condensing temporal economy, connected with processes of disembedding and acceleration, are at the centre of the debate. The conditions of travelling have been deeply altered by a globalizing economy and culture, by revolutionary developments in the technical media of exchange and communication and by a growing body of transnational institutions, securing and restricting the conditions of possibility of exchange. People, goods, weapons, risks, information and ideas can move farther and faster than ever.

Simultaneously, this renders more visible the uneven, somehow old-fashioned and harmonizing character of the metaphor of travelling itself, which is inherently associated with a contemplative mode, with the privilege of spending and losing time. Trying to understand the fast travellings of theories today thus means moving beyond the familiar set of categories associated with the trope of travel.

In postcolonial studies and transnational feminism, notions of exile, displacement and migration have been critically set against the 18th- and 19th-century images that accompany the metaphor of travel like a shadow of its noble and later bourgeois past. Sometimes 'smuggling' may be the word more adequate for describing the moves of theories: a lot of smuggling of books to and fro took place before the Berlin Wall came down. Today, notions of the 'theoretical parachutists' (Petö, 2001) reflect the ambivalent and in parts degrading experiences accompanying the transforming of academies in all Eastern European countries (Braidotti and Griffin, 2002).

Travelling theories will take routes influenced by the stating and defining of knowledge gaps and knowledge divides, which by construction imply an asymmetrical distribution of knowledge that counts. The cultural formation of such 'knowledge gaps' or 'knowledge divides' can be seen as highly overdetermined processes involving constellations of politico-institutional power and opportunity structures, markets and survival strategies, linguistic hegemonies as well as unevenly distributed phantasies and prejudice about the use and exchange value of the works one has not yet read and of the necessity to read them. By defining deficiencies and lacks, such 'knowledge gaps' can add to the dynamic of traffic in theories, accelerating the travels of some, blocking the distribution of others.

The changing conditions of travelling theories cannot be tackled today without reflecting on the recent development of a highly competitive capitalist world market. In a complex configuration of economy, science, technology, policy and culture, it is now obvious that the knowledge and information sectors have become increasingly important domains. Knowledge and reflexive competencies in dealing with it have turned into

highly valued commodities. These developments include far-reaching changes on the institutional level in systems of higher education and research that have come to be termed 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997). Mediated by evaluation systems, individual profiling, quality assurance and criteria-based funding, there is a growing pressure on the academic system, on universities and by now on all disciplines, to produce knowledge that sells: on the markets of invention and innovation, on the diverse expert-markets, on markets of political advice, on the markets of education and last but not least, on the transnational 'quotation market' (Derrida, 1990: 74).

In *The States of Theory* (Carroll, 1990), which in some respects offers a California-based perspective on academic capitalism, Jacques Derrida reflects upon the field of forces influencing the states and the interstate travels of theory. He exemplifies the hasty trafficking in 'theory' by looking at the cantankerous lot of 'neologisms, newisms, postisms, parasitisms, and other small seismisms' (Derrida, 1990: 63), describing them as symptoms of a 'frenzied competition' under the institutional conditions of the academic system. It is this 'frenzied competition' that, as he observes, activates and accelerates the production of titles of 'post' and 'new' driving the merry-go-round of doxographic discourse. As constituents of this field of forces he points to the general 'socio-economic conditions', explicitly he refers to the politico-institutional arrangements of a state or a country, for example 'different teaching and research systems, depending on whether they are predominantly public and state organized, on the one hand, or private and dominated by free enterprise in a capitalist style, on the other', and, besides but not less important than the economy or politico-institutional settings he names 'the psycho-historical and phantasmatical-libidinal dimensions' that can drive the markets, the thrust for knowledge and the acceptance or rejection of theories (Derrida, 1990: 70).

FEMINIST DISCOURSE: A 'HOT' EPISTEMIC CULTURE

Against this background, I now look at the triad of 'race–class–gender' moving in the medium of *feminist* discourse, which I describe first as a particular environment for the travels of theories.

Feminist discourse in a broad sense can be sketched as a polyphonic interdiscourse critically focusing on processes and problematics connected with sex, sexuality and gender; a variable network of communications crossing the boundaries of countries, disciplines, theoretical paradigms and diverse fields of academic, political and professional practice. It materializes in manifold forms: in dispersed exchanges of sometimes more local and insular character and then again it can take the shape of broader transversal currents and interconnected discursive

dispositifs in the Foucauldian sense, often stabilized by forms of institutional governance (e.g. discourse on gender mainstreaming in the EU). The attentive cohesion that runs through this multi-voiced and dissonant network is something quite unique and still amazing. On numerous occasions and in numerous locations, women of different cultural, professional and academic backgrounds, very often strangers, enter into communication by obviously presupposing there would be reasons to address each other on the basis of their gender and that there could be something to share.

Much has been said and written about the fragile foundations of feminism. I tend towards a decisively deconstructive view in reflecting on the homogenizing and totalizing presuppositions of feminism, but I also find it indispensable to neither lose interest in the diversity of women's experiences nor to lose sight of the homogenizing and totalizing dimensions ingrained in the material and symbolic conditions of women's lives within and across sociocultural contexts.

The 'imagined community' (Anderson) of feminism is of cognitive, emotional, normative and practical significance, in spite of and maybe because of its imaginary dimension. The presupposed generalized 'We' functions like a regulative idea: it has substantive effects, but it cannot be positively defined with reference to a collective with a substantial identity of experience and interests. The principal indeterminateness of this generalized 'We' on the one hand and its practical, operational character on the other hand, hint at a fundamental aporia that distinguishes the field of feminist critique from other traditions of critical theory. The aporia lies in the simultaneous indispensability and impossibility of a foundational reference to an epistemic or political subject. It is the effects of this aporia, repeatedly instigating new controversies about the proper object (Butler, 1994) of theory, which have made feminism such a fidgety, sometimes moralizing and idiosyncratic, vital, controversial, productive, 'hot' epistemic culture.

One of the most influential debates reflecting this aporia has been the debate on inequality and difference among women. Politically, it was driven by the normative but counterfactual inclusiveness of the feminist 'We', disrupted by the factual power differences and lines of exclusion within the feminist community. The political and moral need for feminism to be inclusive in order to be able to keep up its own foundational premises opened up the avenues for dispersion and acceleration of 'race/ethnicity, class, gender/sexuality etc.'.

The career of the triad of 'race–class–gender' started around the late 1970s and early 1980s in the US, when feminists of colour voiced vehement criticism of what they saw as a white middle-class bias, an unrecognized self-centredness in much of feminist theory and politics. Understanding race, class and gender as interrelated structures of

oppression, as Patricia Hill Collins named it, was most strongly advocated in the context of black feminism with its comparatively marked radical (left) tradition of social theory (Collins, 1990; Combahee River Collective, 1982; Davis, 1981).

Debates on 'differences' among women climaxed in the late 1980s and early 1990s in a clash between identitarian articulations of 'differences' and radical questionings of the epistemological and political foundations of feminism, ambivalently labelled 'postfeminist' theory. In this respect Judith Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* marks a peak of this development by radically subverting all 'theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and ablebodiedness [and] invariably close with an embarrassed "etc.", at the end of the list' (Butler, 1990: 143).

In spite – but maybe also because – of the diversity of political, disciplinary and theoretical contexts in which questions of 'difference' have been articulated and analysed, the triad of 'race–class–gender', which now regularly includes a number of supplements (religion, age, ability) and the unavoidable 'etc.', has become a fast and flexible traveller in the English-speaking world of western feminism, taking different shapes in the US, Canada, Australia or the UK.

TRAVELLING THE DOXOGRAPHIC DISCOURSE

Analysing the conditions of fast travelling theories in the US context, one material medium of acceleration is to be seen in the highly developed tradition of a certain genre of scholarly texts: the extended orienting genre of course readers, introductory literature, overviews, theory websites, etc. offering shorthand sketches and digestible pieces of theories or debates, sometimes using exaggerated and misleading scenarios in describing controversies, generally accentuating differences between 'positions'. The presentation of 'postmodernism' in this type of literature is an exemplary case of this fashion like 'in' and 'out' structuring. It is these kinds of texts that transport a good deal of what Derrida called the 'doxographic discourse'.

Doxographic discourses are second-order or meta-theoretical discourses in which theories tend to move as taxonomic entities. A characteristic feature of doxographic discourses is, as Derrida noticed, the 'quotation market'. Taking up the speech-act theory distinction of *using* vs *mentioning*, he points out a secret imperative underlying doxographic discourse: 'don't use that concept, only mention it' (Derrida, 1990: 75).

The temporal structures of *using* and *mentioning* differ. Much of the speeding up of 'race–class–gender etc.' has to do with its circulation as shorthand for the latest news in feminist theory within doxographic

discourse. Its reification into a formula merely to be mentioned, being largely stripped of the baggage of concretion, of context and history, has been a condition of possibility of its acceleration. The simultaneous functioning as moral mantra links it to the particular political economy of feminist discourse sketched earlier. The dual message it signals is: 'I'm well informed' and 'I'm politically correct'. By just mentioning other 'differences' besides 'gender', the work to be done continues to be delegated to the respective 'others'.

This mechanism reproduces a division of academic labour and certain specializations along identitarian lines in the field of theory, too. On the one hand, the division of labour according to 'identities' documents the close interconnection of knowledge and interest and the emotional cathexis of motives driving the legitimate desire to explore specific understudied problematics. On the other hand, it is the interplay between mechanisms of delegation and respective claims of competence, authority and authenticity that also keeps the mantra going: mention differences – and continue doing what you've always done. Against this background, the programmatic of 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw, 1991), pioneered by black feminists' interest in theorizing race, class and gender as a trilogy of oppression and discrimination, can be seen as a revolution in perspective. It articulates the aporias in feminist theorizing and promises to lead a way out of the impasses of identity politics in theory production while maintaining feminism's political impetus.

The concept of intersectionality was introduced in the mid-1980s by legal professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in two articles: on black women's employment experiences, and on violence against women of colour. For her the main problem in identity politics was not 'that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite – that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences' (Crenshaw, 1991: 1242). The political observation that ignoring differences *within* groups contributes to tensions *among* groups inspired her to develop intersectionality as a way of 'mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics' (Crenshaw, 1991: 1296). Since Crenshaw's early formulations, the concept of intersectionality has been taken up and elaborated in different ways. It stands for an analytical programmatic in policy contexts focusing on multiple discrimination and vulnerabilities, and it stands also for a more general theoretical programmatic by aiming to relate the integrated study of large-scale societal structures of dominance, the historical and contextual systematics of unevenly distributed power, meso-level institutional arrangements and forms of governance, interactions between individuals and groups as well as individual experiences, including the related symbolic processes of representation, legitimating and meaning production (Weber, 2000).

PROBLEMATIC ARRIVALS: CLASS AND RACE IN A
GERMAN-SPEAKING CONTEXT

The programmatic of intersectionality only recently arrived in the German-speaking context in company with the doxographic mantra of 'race–class–gender', and joined by decontextualized rumours about a lessening social relevance of gender and a crisis of feminist theory altogether (Hark, forthcoming; Knapp, 1999, 2001).

The delayed reception of the triad of 'race–class–gender' has to be seen as part of the general late-coming of German-speaking feminism when compared with the transnational pacesetters of US-American feminism. One important reason for this is a linguistic one. The academic market of Germany, Austria and the German-speaking parts of Switzerland is not large, but it has been large enough to function as a market of its own. Undoubtedly, the pressure to enter the world of Anglophone discourse has been greater in the smaller linguistic communities. Also, the professional need to join the Anglophone discourse varies significantly by discipline. Traffic in Anglophone theories was prompted by departments of English and American literature and the newly established area of cultural studies, which – along with the more disciplinary subject matters – led to a specific selection of theoretical perspectives and debates that were transferred into the German-speaking context along with the discussion on differences among women. In sociology it was mostly a younger generation of feminists, often daughters of migrants or scholars working in fields of migration studies, which took up and pushed the debate on intersections of gender and ethnicity (Apitzsch and Jansen, 2003; Bednarz-Braun and Heß-Meining, 2004; Gümen, 1998; Gutiérrez Rodriguez, 1999).

The arrival of the triad of 'race–class–gender' is accompanied by a significant shifting of meanings that affects all of the categories, but especially the notions of *race* and *class*. While the notion of *class* in the US-American context seems to be a common category denoting the differences in social location, be it in the framework of structural functional, Weberian, Marxist or occupational classificatory approaches, the German notion of *Klasse* is almost exclusively used in the context of Marxist theory. One can even say that along with the 1980s crisis of Marxist theory, in recent sociological theories of inequality the notion of class has largely been replaced by notions of *Schicht* (strata), more cultural notions of horizontal disparities, lifestyle differences or, in the field of systems theory, by the categorical pair of inclusion and exclusion.

Among many others, Ulrich Beck, a well-known social theorist influencing much of the scholarly and public debate on second modernity and globalization, had in the 1980s already pointedly stated that notions like class are Zombie-like categories. In his view, in an era marked by

individualization they have lost their lives as categories of structured inequalities, but still cannot die (Beck, 1983). When German feminists, taking up Anglophone discussions on intersectionality, speak of *Klasse* as one of the central categories of social analysis, they position themselves rhetorically in the past of radical debates of the 1970s. The notion of *Klasse* either suggests feminist theories sticking to yesterday's analytics, or it locates feminist theory at the fringe of today's scholarly debates on inequality. Looked at from *within* feminist discourse and its currents, there is an obvious tension between the line of gender mainstreaming, by which practitioners and theorists of gender or women's studies join the forefront of new public management, and the continued references to *Klasse*, which signals its hang-up with a seemingly outdated tradition of social criticism.

While feminist theory never quite forgot to mention *Klasse* as an axis of inequality in the mantra of 'race–class–gender', it has not really engaged in reformulating it (Acker, 2003). But the merry-go-round of 'old' and 'new' keeps on turning and today the once provocative postmodern diagnoses about the erosion of class structures are themselves being challenged, not only because inequality increases even in the rich western countries, but also because the forms and mechanisms of inequality obviously have not changed as radically as theoretical exaggerations suggested during the short phase of prosperity.[2]

Even more complicated is the landing of the category of *race*. Quotation marks and inverted commas, frequently framing notions of *Rasse*, are symptoms of a deep irritation. Whenever *race* appears without quotation marks one can be sure it is the *English* word being used as a marker of distance in an otherwise German text. *Rasse* is a category that cannot be used in an affirmative way in Germany: it is neither possible to ascribe a *Rasse* to others nor is it acceptable to use *Rasse* as a basis for identity claims, which by comparison is a common practice in the US. And this holds true not only for scholarly contexts, but also for general public discourse, where even racists tend to avoid notions of *Rasse*. A public discussion on how to redefine racial categories so they would be better suited to counting and measuring a 'mixed' population as has recently taken place in the US would be quite unthinkable in Germany.

It is obvious that the impossibility of the notion of *Rasse* relates back to the history of the racist identity politics of National Socialism. It was modern scientific systems of racial distinctions and hierarchies, along with the modern mania of unrestricted practicability that legitimated industrialized genocide of millions of 'others', predominantly Jews, from all over Europe, and warfare legitimated by ethnic (translated as *völkisch*) nationalism that aimed at changing the map of the continent.

Thus, scholarly discourses that take up questions of race in Germany hardly ever use *race* as a categorical resource, but rather make it the topic of critical analysis. *Race* enters discourse as an almost entirely negative

category, but it is exactly the non-fitting of *race* to the context of arrival that poses a challenge. Paradoxically, this becomes visible only by decentring the focus and situating Germany within the EU and in its European neighbourhood. Countries like the UK, France and the Netherlands have been urged to deal in more active ways with their colonial and imperialist past and their present as countries of immigration, while Germany is again late in acknowledging that it has a history of colonialism and has been a country of immigration for a long time. In neighbouring countries like the UK, for example, there seems to exist a diverse handling of notions of *race*: critiques of racial categories are quite common, but so are pragmatic as well as affirmative uses of *race* by minority groups as a category of identity. This configuration of controversial references to *race* invites debate, while in Germany the term is taboo, which leads to a preclusion of the problematic.

Underlying the striking taboos connected to *Rasse* there is a subcutaneous and uncanny continuity in the imaginary of an ethnically homogeneous nation (Gümen, 1996). The effects of this imaginary constellation of tabooing certain categories of difference (race) by secretly presupposing ethnic homogeneity seem to be a compromise and a symptom of unresolved conflict with the past. Paradoxically, it is the same constellation that has made affirmative notions of collective 'identities' deeply suspect for many German feminists – with or without theoretically resorting to deconstruction or negative dialectics (Adorno, 1973). The grounds for what is being called 'identity' have been historically shaken.

INTERSECTIONALITY: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF A THEORETICAL PROGRAMMATIC

While specifics of the historical context seem to preclude taking up the triad of 'race–class–gender' in German feminism it is the same history which – on a more general level – turns the programmatic of intersectional analysis into a significant critical project.

In an article on 'managing the complexity of intersectionality', the American sociologist Leslie McCall states that: 'feminists are perhaps alone in the academy in the extent to which they have embraced intersectionality (the relationship between multiple dimensions of social relations and social identities) as itself a central category of analysis. One could even say that intersectionality is the most important theoretical contribution of women's studies along with racial and ethnic studies so far' (McCall, 2005).

The problematic of inequality and difference has come up politically and epistemologically as a domestic affair of the women's movement and feminist theory. Yet the questions concerning inequalities among women

cannot be answered by looking at *women.* Race, class and gender are relational terms: whom they interconnect and separate, whom they include and exclude how and by what means, and how the respective relationality is composed under specific sociohistorical, cultural and economic conditions will not be understood by examining only one category.

In her discussion on intersectional analyses, McCall distinguishes three approaches: *anti-categorical* approaches that she mostly sees represented in deconstructionist and poststructuralist theories; *intra-categorical* approaches, which focus on differences and inequalities *within* the frame of one of the respective categories, be it class, race, ethnicity or gender; and third, *inter-categorical* approaches, the study of relations between categories.

While McCall takes up questions of methodology, i.e. how to manage the complexities of intersectionality in the field of quantitative empirical sociological research on inequality, I want to comment on the theoretical challenges that have been put on the agenda by this debate.

Although the programmatic associated with intersectionality is supposed to extend from a micro-analytical focus to macro-perspectives aimed at large-scale structures in culture and society, most of the actual studies have concentrated more or less on micro-level analyses. The predominant perspective has been looking at how different categories interact in shaping subjective experiences, often experiences of discrimination, how they determine access to resources and options and how they are taken up in constructions of identity.

And most certainly there was and still is much to gain by adopting these perspectives. Yet, for a more comprehensive understanding of structured subject positions it is necessary to extend the analytical range to include social theoretical approaches: How are gender relations and heteronormative sexuality, class relations and configurations of ethnicity and race/ism interwoven in the structural and institutional make-up of a given society and economy, in national as well as transnational contexts? And what happens to these relationalities under conditions of social, political and economic transformation? As Cornelia Klinger puts it: 'It makes no sense to hint at the superimposing and intersecting aspects of class, race and gender in the worlds of individual experience without being able to specify how and by what means class, race and gender are constituted as social categories' (Klinger, 2003: 25; my translation).

The question that emerges is, whether feminist theory is really equipped to take up the debate on race/ethnicity, class, gender/sexuality and intersectionality on this level of analysis. I'm afraid, with few exceptions, feminist voices have been rather absent in much of the recent social theoretical debates. It looks like the programmatic of multidimensional

intersectional analysis in feminism has developed and moved faster than feminism's capacity to work it through.

If feminist theory does not supply all of the tools needed for moving within this complexity, one has to look for offers from other experts. But are the participants in non-feminist social theoretical debates any better equipped to take up the programmatic of intersectionality? This is also doubtful. While rhetorically travelling in the repertoires of the general, the analytical scope is quite particular, still resting on systematic exclusions: gender relations in particular have hardly been integrated into social theoretical frameworks and in theories of inequality. In spite of much feminist critique there remains a widespread tendency to depotentialize gender as category of social analysis by systematically locating gender relations in the private sphere or on the micro-levels of social interaction.

Looking at this whole discursive setting from a more abstract view highlights corresponding blind spots: while feminist theory brought up questions of 'race–class–gender' and intersectionality via an *internal* critique and self-reflection of the imagined community of feminism, it has not really been able to develop more encompassing theoretical frameworks. On the other hand, non-feminist social theorists are engaged in producing terminological fireworks of single-aspect societies ('service society', 'risk society', 'single society', 'event society', 'multicultural society', 'knowledge society', 'multioption society', etc.) while systematically leaving out central axes of dominance and inequality that structure contemporary society in spite of and via the changes that – undoubtedly – have to be taken into account. The semantic framework of modernization that has influenced much contemporary social theory shows systematic difficulties in dealing with inequalities by the very arrangement of its central categories. This has often been noted with respect to postmodern theory, but it also can be related to self-declared critical theories of (second) modernity, e.g. for Beck and Giddens (Aulenbacher, 2001). One main source of this difficulty lies in the foundational decision of focusing contemporary capitalist society as a new formation without alternatives, characterized by highly reflexive systems of permanent self-correction and reform, thus overestimating aspects of change and underestimating continuities in the structural relations of power and dominance.

There is an irony of history connected to this configuration of corresponding lopsidedness. Travelling the transatlantic route, the triad of 'race–class–gender' – originally designed to reflect an American context – has not only contributed to ideological discourses on European diversity, but it has also turned into a radical historical reminder of the dark sides of modernity. Read as a New World Mirror for Old Europe, the provocative constellation of 'race–class–gender' shows a remarkable potential to shake up the common matrix for understanding European modernity.

Posed as a systematic perspective of study and research, the triad of 'race–class–gender' necessitates calls for a radical transdisciplinary re-inspection of European modernity in its historical interdependency with an emerging capitalist economy, including specific androcentric forms of rationality and rationalization it presupposes and enforces (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1995; Kulke and Scheich, 1992). A more grounded picture of this history would *centre* on the tense and contradictory synchronicity between promises of individual rights and equality on the one hand and politico-scientific as well as economic discourses and practices on the other hand, inventing, establishing, legitimating and exploiting difference and inequality along the lines of gender, class, race and ethnicity. This could help correct the false assumptions, the biases and self-deceptions underlying many theories of modernization and enhance a critical self-reflexivity that turns out to be a basic competence in a globalizing world. An awareness of this uncanny simultaneity of progress and barbarity would not have to deny the gains of modernity yet it would not lend legitimation to hegemonial missions in the name of western values.

It is a long way from a fast travelling mantra of 'race–class–gender' to the theoretical challenges of intersectional analysis. The metaphor of reclaiming baggage that I pose against the speedy economy of doxographic mentioning refers to a time-consuming activity, resembling the psychoanalytical process of '*Erinnern, Wiederholen, Durcharbeiten*'. In the field of theory it works by remembering, by historicizing, contextualizing and comparing with respect to both levels: the so-called ontological level dealing with questions of 'what is' and the epistemological level of how we look at it. And, in a self-reflexive move, it would take up the question of how both of these levels are interrelated in contemporary culture and society and how they shape one's own conditions of proposing. More specifically, 'reclaiming baggage' would translate into: Let's work through the critical theoretical traditions again, but starting from present-day problematics and on the basis of insights gained from former controversies. This perspective would help to avoid a relapse into old either/or positions: cultural vs social, material vs discursive, linguistic vs mentalist paradigm, etc.

Past theoretical controversies have themselves at least in part been relativized and decentred by historical developments. Late capitalism, technology and the new media have produced new configurations of the cultural, the social and the economy; revolutionary developments in the techno-sciences keep informing a lingering erosion of the ontological grounds for powerful binaries like nature/culture (Haraway, 1995). Hybrid compositions of material and discursive matters cannot be grasped by uncritically using the conventional theoretical devices: they are simultaneously as real as nature, as narrated as discourse and as social as society (Latour, 1995: 13).

Some scholars have described these developments in terms of a de-materialization and virtualization transforming the fabric of social reality. Cultural theorist Dietmar Kamper, for example, refers to Marx's notion of 'real abstraction' in order to grasp these tendencies: 'The progressing real abstraction forms an alliance with abstract analyses in a yet puzzling way. Abstraction is construction which substitutes and substitution which fabricates – which amounts to an almost divine project' (Kamper, 1998: 27; my translation). It is obvious, that the processional triad of abstraction, construction and substitution, if it really turns into a powerful sociocultural tendency, would have enormous epistemological consequences, including consequences for trying to analyse these tendencies themselves. Yet, in order to get a more differentiated picture, the ways in which tendencies of real abstraction work within and across different arenas of economy, science, culture, politics, the private sphere and everyday life have to be more thoroughly studied. The specific weight of forces of real abstraction, and the counterforces they evoke, can only be determined within an empirically informed and terminologically complex theoretical framework. Focusing on race/ethnicity, class, gender/sexuality might prove to be heuristically productive in this respect, too, because the constitution of these axes of inequality and difference is itself mediated by particular rationalities and historical constellations of abstracting, constructing and substituting.

OUTLOOK

In recent years, the paradigm of intersectionality has been welcomed by more and more feminists as not only broadening the scope of theory but also as offering a new perspective for a critical project. Undoubtedly, the methodological and theoretical implications that go along with inter-sectional analyses will yet have to be investigated in more detail. To me two questions are of particular interest. The first concerns the relation between – in McCall's terms – *anti-categorical* approaches, *intra-categorical* approaches and *inter-categorical* approaches. My suggestion is that these approaches represent different but not necessarily mutually exclusive perspectives on questions of race/ethnicity, class and gender/sexuality. The strength of the *anti-categorical* approach lies in its deconstructive impetus, keeping at bay terminological closures and reifications including those presupposed by one's own analysis of categorical divisions. *Intra-categorical* approaches and *inter-categorical* approaches seem to be interdependent and their respective potentials unfold best by holding on to both poles of this interdependency. While the first – most obvious in the case of race, ethnicity and gender – often refer to identitarian foundations of analysis, and thus can be strong in securing a horizon for taking up questions of 'difference' as something that cannot be excluded because it matters 'within' a politico-epistemological

community (see earlier), the *inter-categorical* approach transcends the unavoidable parochialism of identitarian framings because questions of 'differences' posed from 'within' point to relationalities the constitution of which cannot be fully comprehended by *intra-categorical* analysis.

The second question relates to the challenges intersectionality poses for social theory. I understand the transatlantic traveller of race, class and gender as presenting a focus for an integrated analysis apt to correct biased and reductionist views of European modernity. In the 19th and 20th centuries, European societies develop as *simultaneously* modern, bourgeois-patriarchal, national and capitalist societies. Analyses focusing on only one of these respective structural characteristics (the modern, patriarchal rule, national constitution, the capitalist mode of production) will not be able to discern the specific *constellation* of interdependent structures whose reconfiguration we witness in the wake of European integration and globalization. Trying to understand contemporary changes in the structural set-up of European societies presupposes an adequately complex analysis of this constellation of differently composed but intermediated structures.

It should be kept in mind, though, that this critical archaeology of modern Europe cannot be pursued in a Eurocentric way or by comparisons following the premises of 'methodological nationalism' (Beck). The European constellation of nation-states also represents a long history of transnational interlacements, including those with the extra-European world, based on violence, hegemonic interests and exchange.

NOTES

1. To name just a few of the numerous variations and contexts in which the metaphor has been taken up: in ethnography, James Clifford's travelling theories, theorists and travelling cultures (Clifford, 1992); Katie King's (1994) *Theory in its Feminist Travels*; Kathy Davis's fine piece on 'Feminist Body/Politics as World Traveller' (Davis, 2002); in cultural analysis, Mieke Bal's (2002) *Travelling Concepts*; see also the Athena European Women's Studies Network project on 'Teaching Travelling Concepts in Women's Studies'. For an overview on cultural studies, see Wolff (1992).
2. The annual meeting of the German Sociological Association (DGS) in 2004, which took place under the heading 'Social Inequality and Cultural Difference', documented a renewed interest in theorizing social inequalities in terms of class structures.

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